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# **LIFE ON THE MISSISSIPPI, Part 4.**

**BY MARK TWAIN**



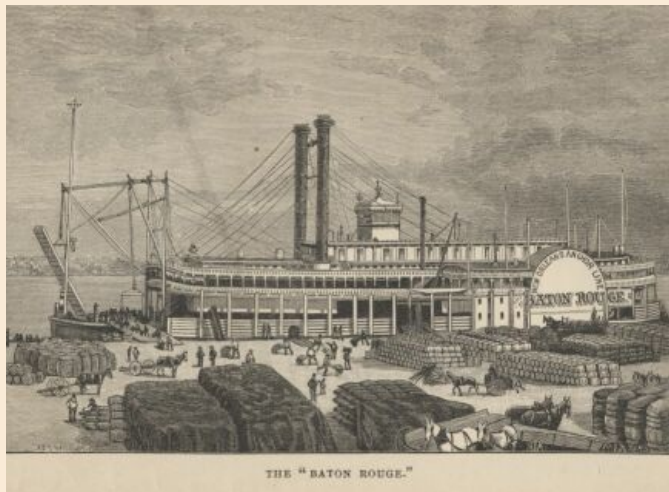
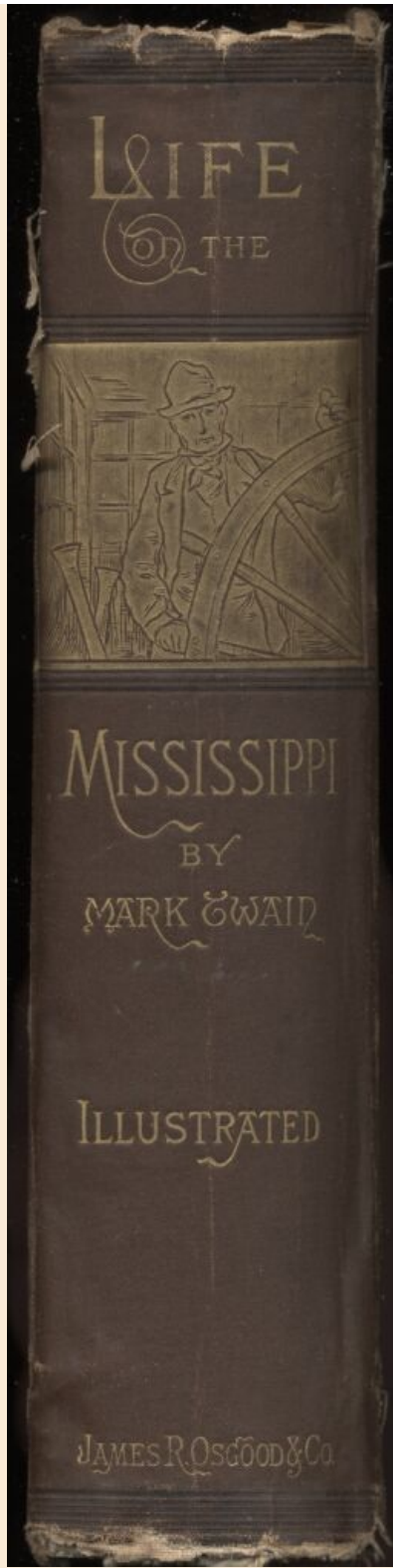
LIFE  
OF THE

MISSISSIPPI

MARK TWAIN

ILLUSTRATED





THE "BATON ROUGE."

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# LIFE ON THE MISSISSIPPI

BY

MARK TWAIN

AUTHOR OF "THE INNOCENTS ABROAD," "ROUGHING IT,"  
"THE PRINCE AND THE PAUPER," ETC.

WITH MORE THAN 300 ILLUSTRATIONS



*Mississippi Steamboat of Fifty Years Ago.*

[SOLD BY SUBSCRIPTION ONLY.]

BOSTON

JAMES R. OSGOOD AND COMPANY

1883

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## Chapter 16

### Racing Days

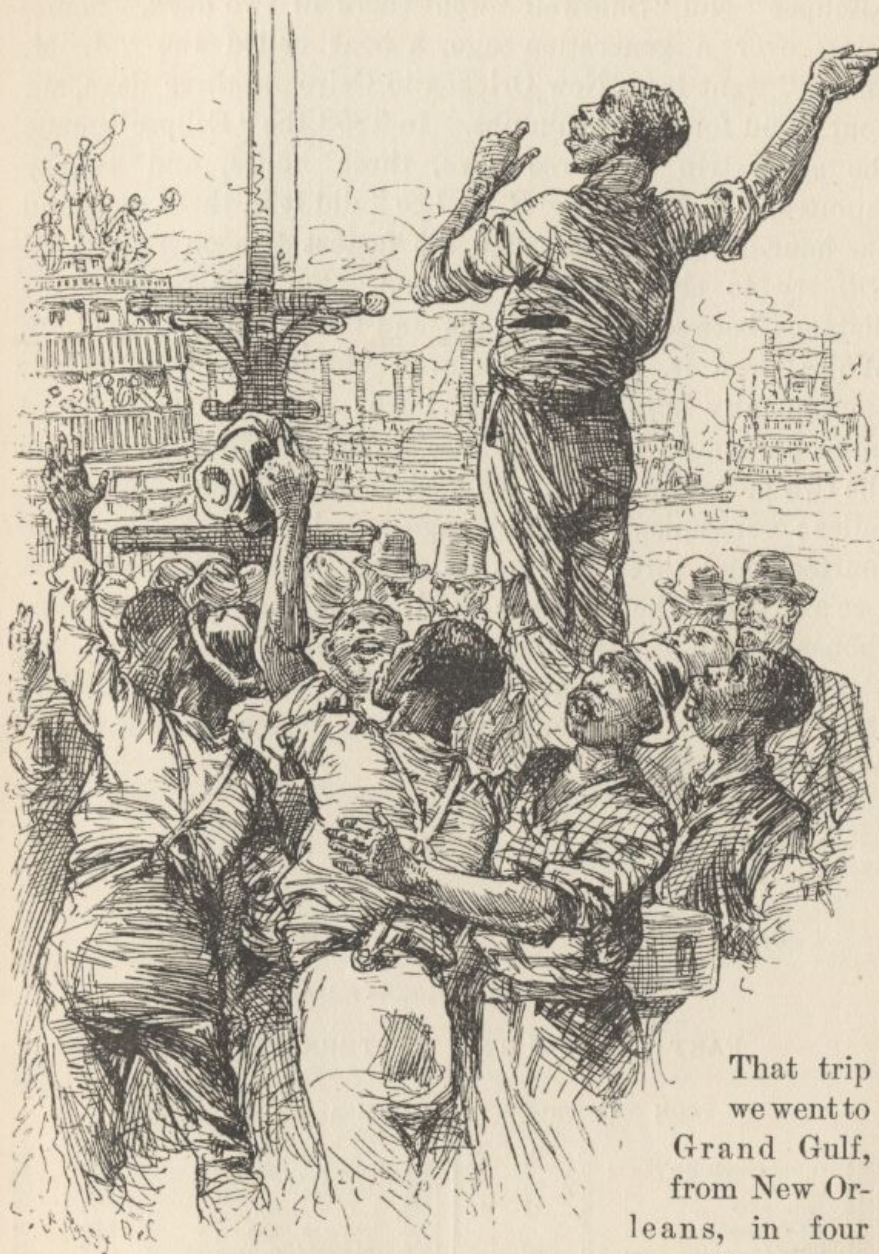
IT was always the custom for the boats to leave New Orleans between four and five o'clock in the afternoon. From three o'clock onward they would be burning rosin and pitch pine (the sign of preparation), and so one had the picturesque spectacle of a rank, some two or three miles long, of tall, ascending columns of coal-black smoke; a colonnade which supported a sable roof of the same smoke blended together and spreading abroad over the city. Every outward-bound boat had its flag flying at the jack-staff, and sometimes a duplicate on the verge staff astern. Two or three miles of mates were commanding and swearing with more than usual emphasis; countless processions of freight barrels and boxes were spinning athwart the levee and flying aboard the stage-planks, belated passengers were dodging and skipping among these frantic things, hoping to reach the fore-castle companion way alive, but having their doubts about it; women with reticules and handboxes were trying to keep up with husbands freighted with carpet-sacks and crying babies, and making a failure of it by losing their heads in the whirl and roar and general distraction; drays and baggage-vans were clattering hither and thither in a wild hurry, every now and then getting blocked and jammed together, and then during ten seconds one could not see them for the profanity, except vaguely and dimly; every windlass connected with every forehatch, from one end of that long array of steamboats to the other, was keeping up a deafening whiz and whir, lowering freight into the hold, and the half-naked crews of perspiring negroes that worked them were roaring such songs as 'De Las' Sack! De Las' Sack!'—inspired to unimaginable exaltation by the chaos of turmoil and racket that was driving everybody else mad.





STEAMBOAT TIME.

By this time the hurricane and boiler decks of the steamers would be packed and black with passengers. The 'last bells' would begin to clang, all down the line, and then the powwow seemed to double; in a moment or two the final warning came,—a simultaneous din of Chinese gongs, with the cry, 'All dat ain't goin', please to git asho!'—and behold, the powwow quadrupled! People came swarming ashore, overturning excited stragglers that were trying to swarm aboard. One more moment later a long array of stage-planks was being hauled in, each with its customary latest passenger clinging to the end of it with teeth, nails, and everything else, and the customary latest procrastinator making a wild spring shoreward over his head.



THE PARTING CHORUS.

That trip  
we went to  
Grand Gulf,  
from New Or-  
leans, in four  
days (three hun-  
dred and forty  
miles); the

“Eclipse” and “Shotwell” did it in one. We were nine  
days out, in the chute of 63 (seven hundred miles); the

Now a number of the boats slide backward into the stream, leaving wide gaps in the serried rank of steamers. Citizens crowd the decks of boats that are not to go, in order to see the sight. Steamer after steamer straightens herself up, gathers all her strength, and presently comes swinging by, under a tremendous head of steam, with flag flying, black smoke rolling, and her entire crew of firemen and deck-hands (usually swarthy negroes) massed together on the forecastle, the best 'voice' in the lot towering from the midst (being mounted on the capstan), waving his hat or a flag, and all roaring a mighty chorus, while the parting cannons boom and the multitudinous spectators swing their hats and huzza! Steamer after steamer falls into line, and the stately procession goes winging its flight up the river.

In the old times, whenever two fast boats started out on a race, with a big crowd of people looking on, it was inspiring to hear the crews sing, especially if the time were night-fall, and the forecastle lit up with the red glare of the torch-baskets. Racing was royal fun. The public always had an idea that racing was dangerous; whereas the opposite was the case—that is, after the laws were passed which restricted each boat to just so many pounds of steam to the square inch. No engineer was ever sleepy or careless when his heart was in a race. He was constantly on the alert, trying gauge-cocks and watching things. The dangerous place was on slow, plodding boats,



where the engineers drowsed around and allowed chips to get into the 'doctor' and shut off the water supply from the boilers.



In the 'flush times' of steamboating, a race between two notoriously fleet steamers was an event of vast importance. The date was set for it several weeks in advance, and from that time forward, the whole Mississippi Valley was in a state of consuming excitement. Politics and the weather were dropped, and people talked only of the coming race. As the time approached, the two steamers 'stripped' and got ready. Every encumbrance that added weight, or exposed a resisting surface to wind or water, was removed, if the boat could possibly do without it. The 'spars,' and sometimes even their supporting derricks, were sent ashore, and no means left to set the boat afloat in case she got aground. When the 'Eclipse' and the 'A. L. Shotwell' ran their great race many years ago, it was said that pains were taken to scrape the gilding off the fanciful device which hung between the 'Eclipse's' chimneys, and that for that one trip the captain left off his kid gloves and had his head shaved. But I always doubted these things.

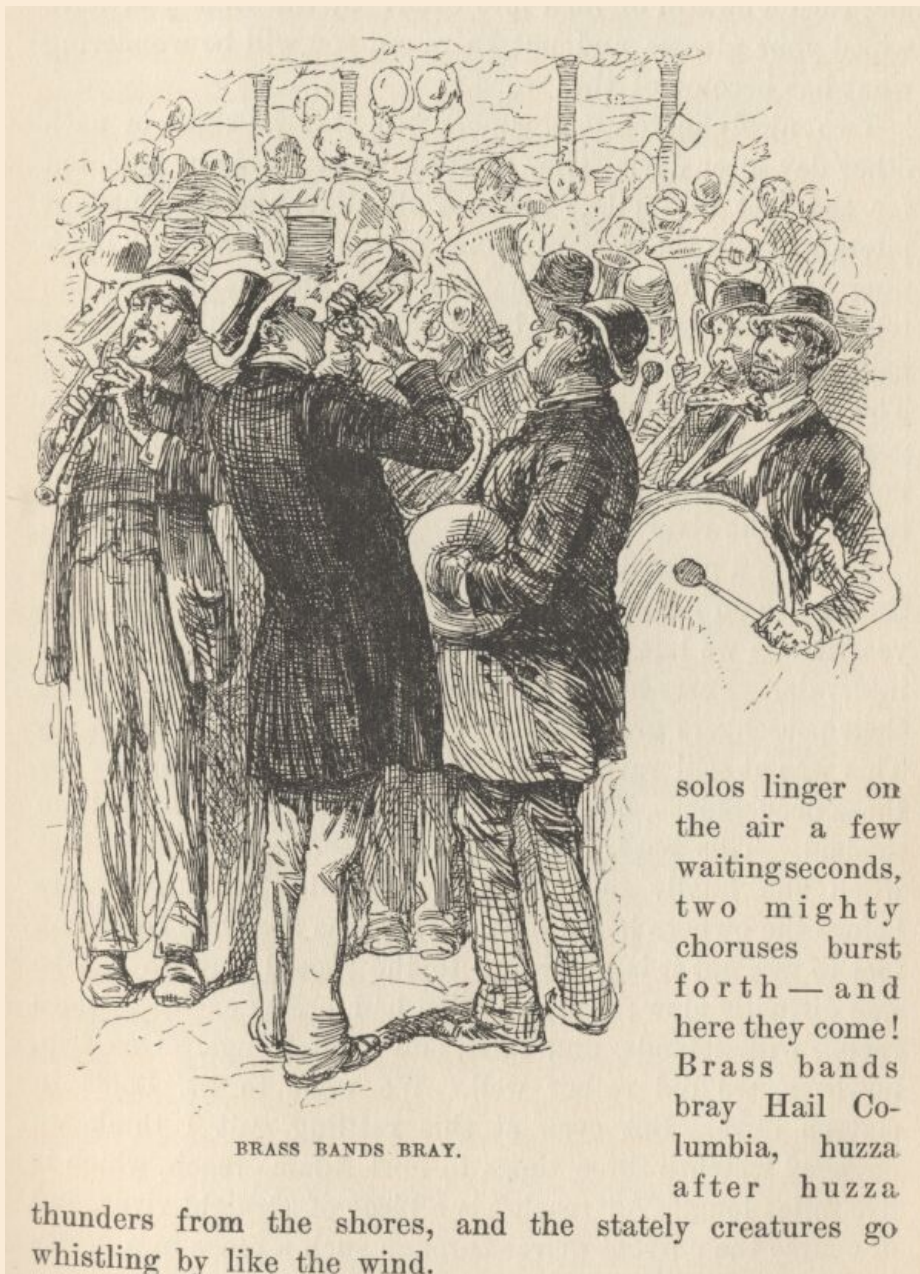
If the boat was known to make her best speed when drawing five and a half feet forward and five feet aft, she was carefully loaded to that exact figure—she wouldn't enter a dose of homoeopathic pills on her manifest after that. Hardly any passengers were taken, because they not only add weight but they never will 'trim boat.' They always run to the side when there is anything to see, whereas a conscientious and experienced steamboatman would stick to the center of the boat and part his hair in the middle with a spirit level.

No way-freights and no way-passengers were allowed, for the racers would stop only at the largest towns, and then it would be only 'touch and go.' Coal flats and wood flats were contracted for beforehand, and these were kept ready to hitch on to the flying steamers at a moment's warning. Double crews were carried, so that all work could be quickly done.

The chosen date being come, and all things in readiness, the two great steamers back into the stream, and lie there jockeying a moment, and apparently watching each other's slightest movement, like sentient creatures; flags drooping, the pent steam shrieking through safety-valves, the black smoke rolling and tumbling from the chimneys and darkening all the air. People, people everywhere; the shores, the house-tops, the steamboats, the ships, are packed with them, and you know that the borders of the broad Mississippi are going to be fringed with humanity thence northward twelve hundred miles, to welcome these racers.

Presently tall columns of steam burst from the 'scape-pipes of both steamers, two guns boom a good-bye, two red-shirted heroes mounted on capstans wave their small flags above the massed crews on the forecastles, two plaintive solos linger on the air a few waiting seconds, two mighty choruses burst forth—and here they come! Brass bands bray Hail Columbia, huzza after huzza thunders from the shores, and the stately creatures go whistling by like the wind.





BRASS BANDS BRAY.

solos linger on  
the air a few  
waiting seconds,  
two mighty  
choruses burst  
forth — and  
here they come!  
Brass bands  
bray Hail Co-  
lumbia, huzza  
after huzza

thunders from the shores, and the stately creatures go  
whistling by like the wind.

Those boats will never halt a moment between New Orleans and St. Louis, except for a second or two at large towns, or to hitch thirty-cord wood-boats alongside. You should be on board when they take a couple of those wood-boats in tow and turn a swarm of men into each; by the time you have wiped your glasses and put them on, you will be wondering what has become of that wood.

Two nicely matched steamers will stay in sight of each other day after day. They might even stay side by side, but for the fact that pilots are not all alike, and the smartest pilots will win the race. If one of the boats has a 'lightning' pilot, whose 'partner' is a trifle his inferior, you can tell which one is on watch by noting whether that boat has gained ground or lost some during each four-hour stretch. The shrewdest pilot can delay a boat if he has not a fine genius for steering. Steering is a very high art. One must not keep a rudder dragging across a boat's stem if he wants to get up the river fast.

There is a great difference in boats, of course. For a long time I was on a boat that was so slow we used to forget what year it was we left port in. But of course this was at rare intervals. Ferryboats used to lose valuable trips because their passengers grew old and died, waiting for us to get by. This was at still rarer intervals. I had the documents for these occurrences, but through carelessness they have been mislaid. This boat, the 'John J. Roe,' was so slow that when she finally sunk in Madrid Bend, it was five years before the owners heard of it. That was always a confusing fact to me, but it is according to the record, any way. She was dismally slow; still, we often had pretty exciting times racing with islands, and rafts, and such things. One trip, however, we did rather well. We went to St. Louis in sixteen days. But even at this rattling gait I think we changed watches three times in Fort Adams reach, which is five miles long. A 'reach' is a piece of straight river, and of course the current drives through such a place in a pretty lively way.

That trip we went to Grand Gulf, from New Orleans, in four days (three hundred and forty

miles); the 'Eclipse' and 'Shotwell' did it in one. We were nine days out, in the chute of 63 (seven hundred miles); the 'Eclipse' and 'Shotwell' went there in two days. Something over a generation ago, a boat called the 'J. M. White' went from New Orleans to Cairo in three days, six hours, and forty-four minutes. In 1853 the 'Eclipse' made the same trip in three days, three hours, and twenty minutes. {footnote [Time disputed. Some authorities add 1 hour and 16 minutes to this.]} In 1870 the 'R. E. Lee' did it in three days and ONE hour. This last is called the fastest trip on record. I will try to show that it was not. For this reason: the distance between New Orleans and Cairo, when the 'J. M. White' ran it, was about eleven hundred and six miles; consequently her average speed was a trifle over fourteen miles per hour. In the 'Eclipse's' day the distance between the two ports had become reduced to one thousand and eighty miles; consequently her average speed was a shade under fourteen and three-eighths miles per hour. In the 'R. E. Lee's' time the distance had diminished to about one thousand and thirty miles; consequently her average was about fourteen and one-eighth miles per hour. Therefore the 'Eclipse's' was conspicuously the fastest time that has ever been made.

## THE RECORD OF SOME FAMOUS TRIPS.

[From Commodore Rollingpin's Almanac.]

### FAST TIME ON THE WESTERN WATERS.

FROM NEW ORLEANS TO NATCHEZ—268 MILES.

	D.	H.	M.		H.	M.
1814. Orleans made the run in	6	6	40	1844. Sultana . . made the run in	19	45
1814. Comet " "	5	10		1851. Magnolia " "	19	50
1815. Enterprise " "	4	11	20	1853. A. L. Shotwell " "	19	49
1817. Washington " "	4			1853. Southern Belle " "	20	3
1817. Shelby " "	3	20		1853. Princess (No. 4) " "	20	26
1819. Paragon " "	3	8		1853. Eclipse " "	19	47
1828. Tecumseh " "	3	1	20	1855. Princess (New) " "	18	53
1834. Tuscarora " "	1	21		1855. Natchez (New) " "	17	30
1838. Natchez " "	1	17		1856. Princess (New) " "	17	30
1840. Ed. Shippen " "	1	8		1870. Natchez " "	17	17
1842. Belle of the West " "	1	18		1870. R. E. Lee " "	17	11

<sup>1</sup> Time disputed. Some authorities add 1 hour and 16 minutes to this.

TIME TABLES.—Continued.

FROM NEW ORLEANS TO CAIRO—1,024 MILES.

	D.	H.	M.		D.	H.	M.
1844. J. M. White made the run in	3	6	44	1869. Dexter . . . made the run in	3	6	20
1852. Reindeer " " "	3	12	45	1870. Natchez " " "	3	4	34
1853. Eclipse " " "	3	4	4	1870. R. E. Lee " " "	3	1	
1853. A. L. Shotwell " " "	3	3	40				

FROM NEW ORLEANS TO LOUISVILLE—1,440 MILES.

	D.	H.	M.		D.	H.	M.
1815. Enterprise made the run in	25	2	40	1840. Ed. Shippen made the run in	5	14	
1817. Washington " " "	25			1842. Belle of the West " " "	6	14	
1817. Shelby " " "	20	4	20	1843. Duke of Orleans " " "	5	23	
1819. Paragon " " "	18	10		1844. Sultana " " "	5	12	
1828. Tecumseh " " "	8	4		1849. Bostona " " "	5	8	
1834. Tuscarora " " "	7	16		1851. Belle Key " " "	4	23	
1837. Gen. Brown " " "	6	22		1852. Reindeer " " "	4	20	45
1837. Randolph " " "	6	22		1852. Eclipse " " "	4	19	
1837. Empress " " "	6	17		1853. A. L. Shotwell " " "	4	10	20
1837. Sultana " " "	6	15		1853. Eclipse " " "	4	9	30

FROM NEW ORLEANS TO DONALDSVILLE—78 MILES.

	H.	M.		H.	M.
1852. A. L. Shotwell made the run in	5	42	1860. Atlantic . . . made the run in	5	11
1852. Eclipse " " "	5	42	1860. Gen. Quitman " " "	5	6
1854. Sultana " " "	5	12	1865. Ruth " " "	4	43
1856. Princess " " "	4	51	1870. R. E. Lee " " "	4	59

FROM NEW ORLEANS TO ST. LOUIS—1,218 MILES.

	D.	H.	M.		D.	H.	M.
1844. J. M. White made the run in	3	23	9	1870. Natchez . . made the run in	3	21	58
1849. Missouri " " "	4	19		1870. R. E. Lee " " "	3	18	14
1869. Dexter " " "	4	9					

FROM LOUISVILLE TO CINCINNATI—141 MILES.

	D.	H.	M.		D.	H.	M.
1819. Gen. Pike made the run in	1	16		1843. Congress . . made the run in	12	20	
1819. Paragon " " "	1	14	20	1846. Ben Franklin (No. 6) " " "	11	45	
1822. Wheeling Packet " " "	1	10		1852. Alleghaney " " "	10	38	
1837. Moselle " " "		12		1852. Pittsburgh " " "	10	23	
1843. Duke of Orleans " " "		12		1853. Telegraph No. 3 " " "	9	52	

FROM LOUISVILLE TO ST. LOUIS—750 MILES.

	D.	H.	M.		D.	H.	M.
1843. Congress . . made the run in	2	1		1854. Northerner made the run in	1	22	30
1854. Pike " " "	1	23		1855. Southerner " " "	1	19	

FROM CINCINNATI TO PITTSBURG—490 MILES.

	D.	H.			D.	H.
1850. Telegraph No. 2 made the run in	1	17		1852. Pittsburgh . . . made the run in	1	15
1851. Buckeye State " " "	1	16				

FROM ST. LOUIS TO ALTON—30 MILES.

	H.	M.		H.	M.
1853. Altona . . . . made the run in	1	35	1876. War Eagle . . . made the run in	1	37
1876. Golden Eagle " " "	1	37			

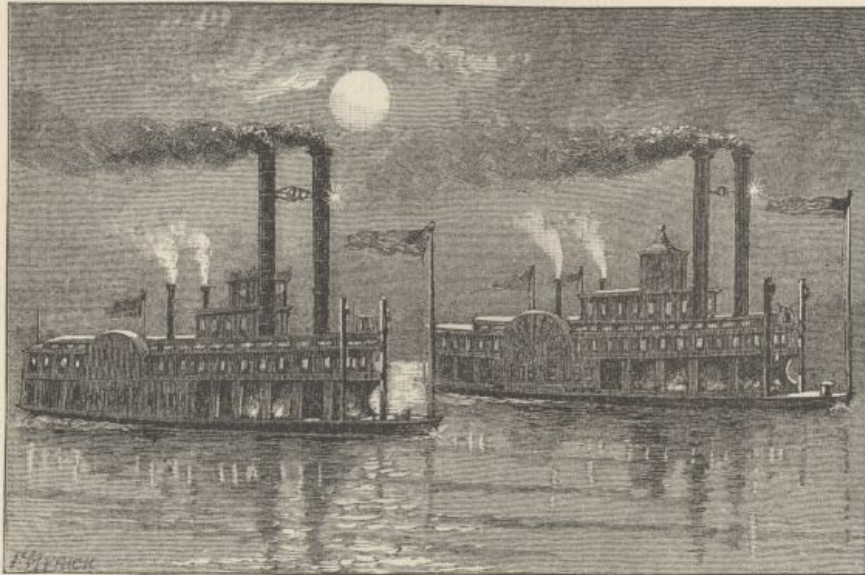
MISCELLANEOUS RUNS.

In June, 1859, the St. Louis and Keokuk Packet, City of Louisiana, made the run from St. Louis to Keokuk (214 miles) in 16 hours and 20 minutes, the best time on record.

In 1868 the steamer Hawkeye State, of the Northern Line Packet Company, made the run from St. Louis to St. Paul (800 miles) in 2 days and 20 hours. Never was beaten.

In 1853 the steamer Polar Star made the run from St. Louis to St. Joseph, on the Missouri River, in 64 hours. In July, 1856, the steamer Jas. H. Lucas, Andy Wineland, Master, made the same run in 60 hours and 57 minutes. The distance between the ports is 600 miles, and when the difficulties of navigating the turbulent Missouri are taken into consideration, the performance of the Lucas deserves especial mention.





THE RUN OF THE ROBERT E. LEE.

The time made by the R. E. Lee from New Orleans to St. Louis in 1870, in her famous race with the Natchez, is the best on record, and, inasmuch as the race created a national interest, we give below her time table from port to port.

Left New Orleans, Thursday, June 30th, 1870, at 4 o'clock and 55 minutes, p. m. ; reached

	D.	H.	M.		D.	H.	M.
Carrollton . . . . .			27½	Vicksburg . . . . .	1		38
Harry Hills . . . . .	1	00½		Milliken's Bend . . . . .	1	2	37
Red Church . . . . .	1	39		Bailey's . . . . .	1	3	48
Bonnet Carre . . . . .	2	38		Lake Providence . . . . .	1	5	47
College Point . . . . .	3	50½		Greenville . . . . .	1	10	55
Donaldsonville . . . . .	4	59		Napoleon . . . . .	1	16	22
Plaquemine . . . . .	7	05½		White River . . . . .	1	16	56
Baton Rouge . . . . .	8	25		Australia . . . . .	1	19	
Bayou Sara . . . . .	10	26		Helena . . . . .	1	23	25
Red River . . . . .	12	56		Half Mile Below St. Francis . . . . .	2		
Stamps . . . . .	13	56		Memphis . . . . .	2	6	9
Bryaro . . . . .	15	51½		Foot of Island 37 . . . . .	2	9	
Hinderson's . . . . .	16	29		Foot of Island 26 . . . . .	2	13	30
Natchez . . . . .	17	11		Tow-head, Island 14 . . . . .	2	17	23
Cole's Creek . . . . .	19	21		New Madrid . . . . .	2	19	50
Waterproof . . . . .	18	53		Dry Bar No. 10 . . . . .	2	20	37
Rodney . . . . .	20	45		Foot of Island 8 . . . . .	2	21	25
St. Joseph . . . . .	21	02		Upper Tow-head — Lucas Bend . . . . .	3		
Grand Gulf . . . . .	22	06		Cairo . . . . .	3	1	
Hard Times . . . . .	22	18		St. Louis . . . . .	3	18	14
Half Mile Below Warrenton . . . . .	1						

The Lee landed at St. Louis at 11.25 A. M., on July 4th, 1870 — six hours and thirty-six minutes ahead of the Natchez. The officers of the Natchez claimed seven hours and one minute stoppage on account of fog and repairing machinery. The R. E. Lee was commanded by Captain John W. Cannon, and the Natchez was in charge of that veteran Southern boatman, Captain Thomas P. Leathers.

## Chapter 17

### Cut-offs and Stephen

THESE dry details are of importance in one particular. They give me an opportunity of introducing one of the Mississippi's oddest peculiarities,—that of shortening its length from time to time. If you will throw a long, pliant apple-paring over your shoulder, it will pretty fairly shape itself into an average section of the Mississippi River; that is, the nine or ten hundred miles stretching from Cairo, Illinois, southward to New Orleans, the same being wonderfully crooked, with a brief straight bit here and there at wide intervals. The two hundred-mile stretch from Cairo northward to St. Louis is by no means so crooked, that being a rocky country which the

river cannot cut much.

The water cuts the alluvial banks of the 'lower' river into deep horseshoe curves; so deep, indeed, that in some places if you were to get ashore at one extremity of the horseshoe and walk across the neck, half or three quarters of a mile, you could sit down and rest a couple of hours while your steamer was coming around the long elbow, at a speed of ten miles an hour, to take you aboard again. When the river is rising fast, some scoundrel whose plantation is back in the country, and therefore of inferior value, has only to watch his chance, cut a little gutter across the narrow neck of land some dark night, and turn the water into it, and in a wonderfully short time a miracle has happened: to wit, the whole Mississippi has taken possession of that little ditch, and placed the countryman's plantation on its bank (quadrupling its value), and that other party's formerly valuable plantation finds itself away out yonder on a big island; the old watercourse around it will soon shoal up, boats cannot approach within ten miles of it, and down goes its value to a fourth of its former worth. Watches are kept on those narrow necks, at needful times, and if a man happens to be caught cutting a ditch across them, the chances are all against his ever having another opportunity to cut a ditch.



Pray observe some of the effects of this ditching business. Once there was a neck opposite Port Hudson, Louisiana, which was only half a mile across, in its narrowest place. You could walk across there in fifteen minutes; but if you made the journey around the cape on a raft, you traveled thirty-five miles to accomplish the same thing. In 1722 the river darted through that neck, deserted its old bed, and thus shortened itself thirty-five miles. In the same way it shortened itself twenty-five miles at Black Hawk Point in 1699. Below Red River Landing, Raccourci cut-off was made (forty or fifty years ago, I think). This shortened the river twenty-eight miles. In our day, if you travel by river from the southernmost of these three cut-offs to the northernmost, you go only seventy miles. To do the same thing a hundred and seventy-six years ago, one had to go a hundred and fifty-eight miles!—shortening of eighty-eight miles in that trifling distance. At some forgotten time in the past, cut-offs were made above Vidalia, Louisiana; at island 92; at island 84; and at Hale's Point. These shortened the river, in the aggregate, seventy-seven miles.

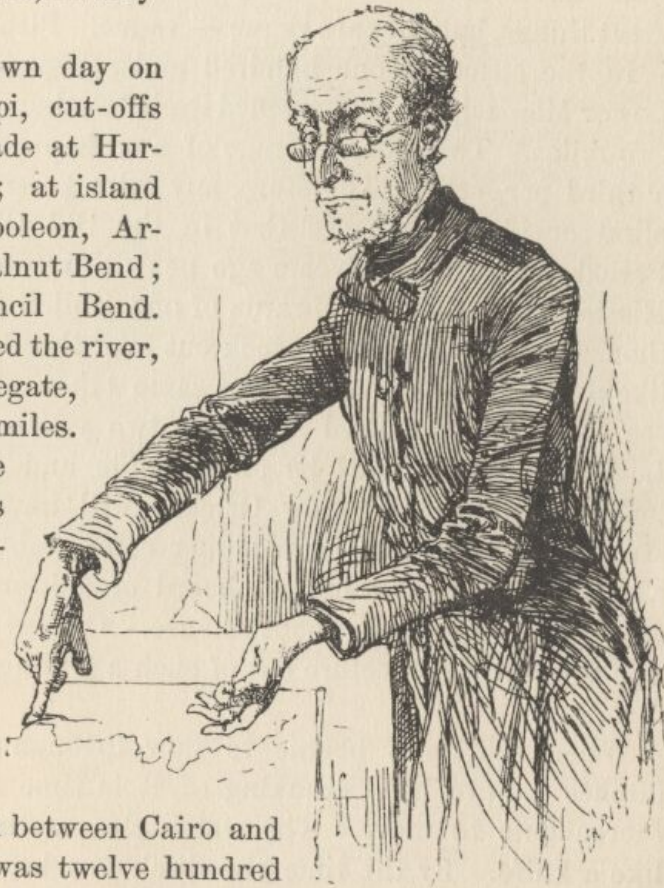


trifling distance. At some forgotten time in the past, cut-offs were made above Vidalia, Louisiana; at island 92; at island 84; and at Hale's Point. These shortened the river, in the aggregate, seventy-seven miles.

Since my own day on the Mississippi, cut-offs have been made at Hurricane Island; at island 100; at Napoleon, Arkansas; at Walnut Bend; and at Council Bend. These shortened the river, in the aggregate, sixty-seven miles.

In my own time a cut-off was made at American Bend, which shortened the river ten miles or more.

Therefore, the Mississippi between Cairo and New Orleans was twelve hundred and fifteen miles long one hundred and seventy-six years ago.



A SCIENTIST.

Since my own day on the Mississippi, cut-offs have been made at Hurricane Island; at island 100; at Napoleon, Arkansas; at Walnut Bend; and at Council Bend. These shortened the river, in the aggregate, sixty-seven miles. In my own time a cut-off was made at American Bend, which shortened the river ten miles or more.

Therefore, the Mississippi between Cairo and New Orleans was twelve hundred and fifteen miles long one hundred and seventy-six years ago. It was eleven hundred and eighty after the cut-off of 1722. It was one thousand and forty after the American Bend cut-off. It has lost sixty-seven miles since. Consequently its length is only nine hundred and seventy-three miles at present.

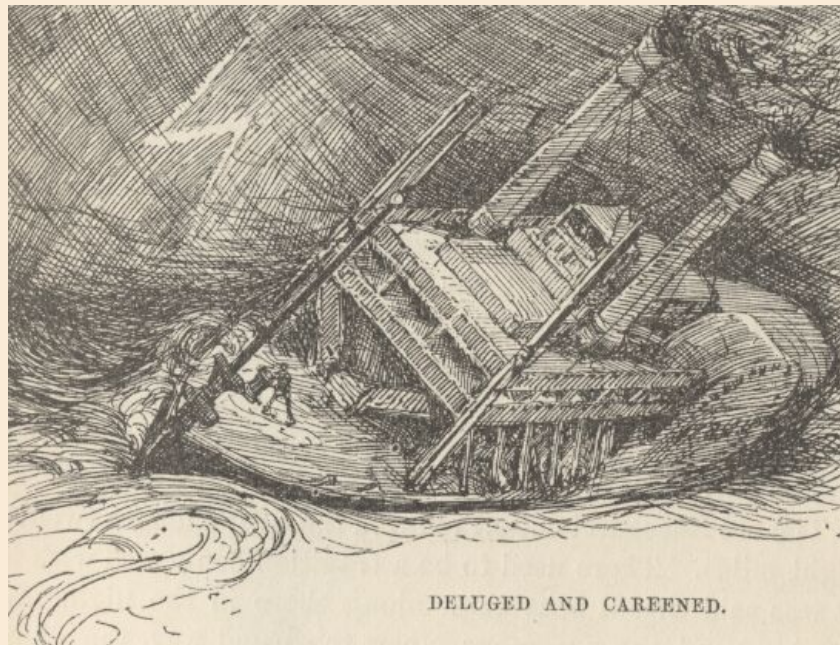
Now, if I wanted to be one of those ponderous scientific people, and 'let on' to prove what had occurred in the remote past by what had occurred in a given time in the recent past, or what will occur in the far future by what has occurred in late years, what an opportunity is here! Geology never had such a chance, nor such exact data to argue from! Nor 'development of species,' either! Glacial epochs are great things, but they are vague—vague. Please observe:—

In the space of one hundred and seventy-six years the Lower Mississippi has shortened itself two hundred and forty-two miles. That is an average of a trifle over one mile and a third per year. Therefore, any calm person, who is not blind or idiotic, can see that in the Old Oolitic Silurian Period, just a million years ago next November, the Lower Mississippi River was upwards of one million three hundred thousand miles long, and stuck out over the Gulf of Mexico like a fishing-rod. And by the same token any person can see that seven hundred and forty-two years from now the Lower Mississippi will be only a mile and three-quarters long, and Cairo and New Orleans will have joined their streets together, and be plodding comfortably along under a single mayor and a mutual board of aldermen. There is something fascinating about science. One gets such wholesale returns of conjecture out of such a trifling investment of fact.

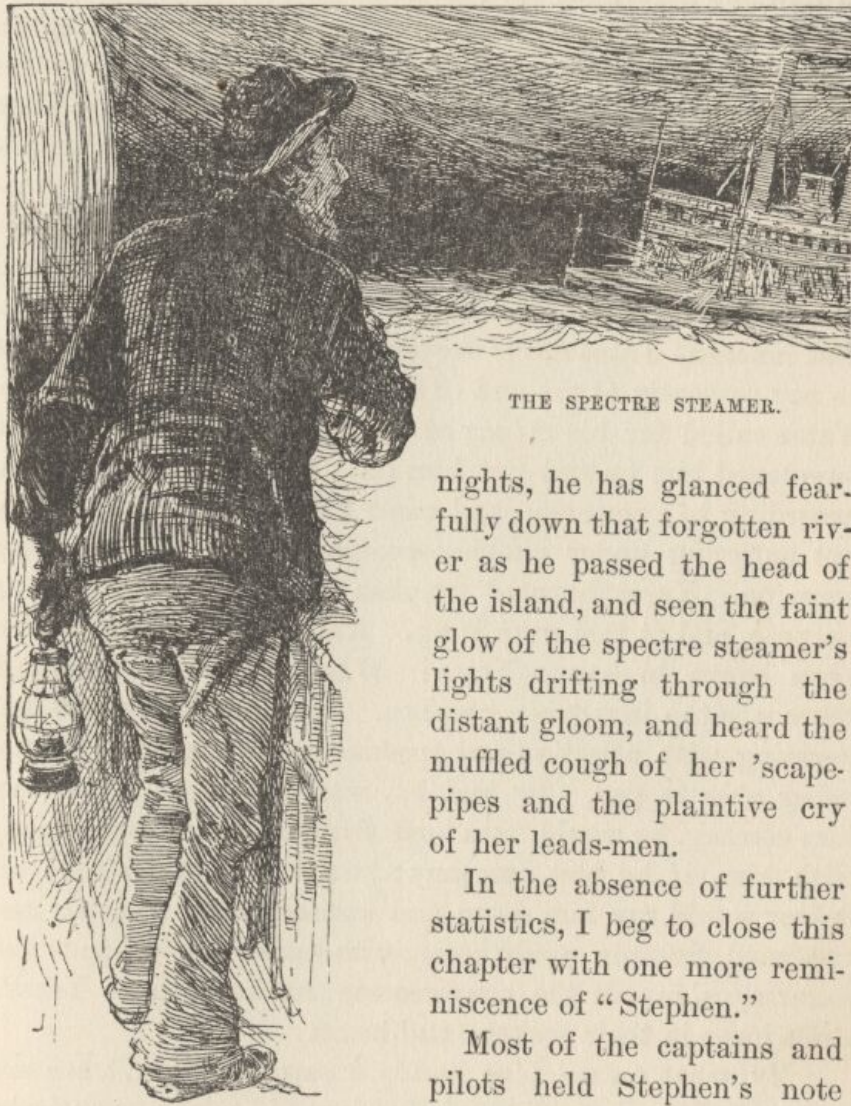
When the water begins to flow through one of those ditches I have been speaking of, it is time for the people thereabouts to move. The water cleaves the banks away like a knife. By the time the ditch has become twelve or fifteen feet wide, the calamity is as good as accomplished, for no power on earth can stop it now. When the width has reached a hundred yards, the banks begin to peel off in slices half an acre wide. The current flowing around the bend traveled formerly only five miles an hour; now it is tremendously increased by the shortening of the distance. I was on



board the first boat that tried to go through the cut-off at American Bend, but we did not get through. It was toward midnight, and a wild night it was—thunder, lightning, and torrents of rain. It was estimated that the current in the cut-off was making about fifteen or twenty miles an hour; twelve or thirteen was the best our boat could do, even in tolerably slack water, therefore perhaps we were foolish to try the cut-off. However, Mr. Brown was ambitious, and he kept on trying. The eddy running up the bank, under the 'point,' was about as swift as the current out in the middle; so we would go flying up the shore like a lightning express train, get on a big head of steam, and 'stand by for a surge' when we struck the current that was whirling by the point. But all our preparations were useless. The instant the current hit us it spun us around like a top, the water deluged the forecastle, and the boat careened so far over that one could hardly keep his feet. The next instant we were away down the river, clawing with might and main to keep out of the woods. We tried the experiment four times. I stood on the forecastle companion way to see. It was astonishing to observe how suddenly the boat would spin around and turn tail the moment she emerged from the eddy and the current struck her nose. The sounding concussion and the quivering would have been about the same if she had come full speed against a sand-bank. Under the lightning flashes one could see the plantation cabins and the goodly acres tumble into the river; and the crash they made was not a bad effort at thunder. Once, when we spun around, we only missed a house about twenty feet, that had a light burning in the window; and in the same instant that house went overboard. Nobody could stay on our forecastle; the water swept across it in a torrent every time we plunged athwart the current. At the end of our fourth effort we brought up in the woods two miles below the cut-off; all the country there was overflowed, of course. A day or two later the cut-off was three-quarters of a mile wide, and boats passed up through it without much difficulty, and so saved ten miles.



The old Raccourci cut-off reduced the river's length twenty-eight miles. There used to be a tradition connected with it. It was said that a boat came along there in the night and went around the enormous elbow the usual way, the pilots not knowing that the cut-off had been made. It was a grisly, hideous night, and all shapes were vague and distorted. The old bend had already begun to fill up, and the boat got to running away from mysterious reefs, and occasionally hitting one. The perplexed pilots fell to swearing, and finally uttered the entirely unnecessary wish that they might never get out of that place. As always happens in such cases, that particular prayer was answered, and the others neglected. So to this day that phantom steamer is still butting around in that deserted river, trying to find her way out. More than one grave watchman has sworn to me that on drizzly, dismal nights, he has glanced fearfully down that forgotten river as he passed the head of the island, and seen the faint glow of the specter steamer's lights drifting through the distant gloom, and heard the muffled cough of her 'scape-pipes and the plaintive cry of her leadsmen.



THE SPECTRE STEAMER.

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In the absence of further statistics, I beg to close this chapter with one more reminiscence of "Stephen."

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from two hundred and fifty dollars upward. Stephen never paid one of these notes, but he was very prompt and very zealous about renewing them every twelve month.

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Of course there came a time, at last, when Stephen could no longer borrow of his ancient creditors; so he was obliged to lie in wait for new men who did not know him. Such a victim was good-hearted, simple natured young Yates (I use a fictitious name, but the real name began, as this one does, with a Y). Young Yates graduated as a pilot, got a berth, and when the month was ended and he stepped up to the clerk's office and received his two hundred and fifty dollars in crisp new bills, Stephen was there! His silvery tongue began to wag, and in a very little while Yates's two hundred and fifty dollars had changed hands. The fact was soon known at pilot headquarters, and the amusement and satisfaction of the old creditors were large and generous. But innocent Yates never suspected that Stephen's promise to pay promptly at the end of the week was a worthless one. Yates called for his money at the stipulated time; Stephen sweetened him up and put him off a week. He called then, according to agreement, and came away sugar-coated again, but suffering under another postponement. So the thing went on. Yates haunted Stephen week after week, to no purpose, and at last gave it up. And then straightway Stephen began to haunt Yates! Wherever Yates appeared, there was the inevitable Stephen. And not only there, but beaming with affection and gushing with apologies for not being able to pay. By and by, whenever poor Yates saw him coming, he would turn and fly, and drag his company with him, if he had company; but it was of no use; his debtor would run him down and corner him. Panting and red-faced, Stephen would come, with outstretched hands and eager eyes, invade the conversation, shake both of Yates's arms loose in their sockets, and begin—





'My, what a race I've had! I saw you didn't see me, and so I clapped on all steam for fear I'd miss you entirely. And here you are! there, just stand so, and let me look at you! just the same old noble countenance.' [To Yates's friend:] 'Just look at him! LOOK at him! Ain't it just GOOD to look at him! AIN'T it now? Ain't he just a picture! SOME call him a picture; I call him a panorama! That's what he is—an entire panorama. And now I'm reminded! How I do wish I could have seen you an hour earlier! For twenty-four hours I've been saving up that two hundred and fifty dollars for you; been looking for you everywhere. I waited at the Planter's from six yesterday evening till two o'clock this morning, without rest or food; my wife says, "Where have you been all night?" I said, "This debt lies heavy on my mind." She says, "In all my days I never saw a man take a debt to heart the way you do." I said, "It's my nature; how can I change it?" She says, "Well, do go to bed and get some rest." I said, "Not till that poor, noble young man has got his money." So I set up all night, and this morning out I shot, and the first man I struck told me you had shipped on the "Grand Turk" and gone to New Orleans. Well, sir, I had to lean up against a building and cry. So help me goodness, I couldn't help it. The man that owned the place come out cleaning up with a rag, and said he didn't like to have people cry against his building, and then it seemed to me that the whole world had turned against me, and it wasn't any use to live any more; and coming along an hour ago, suffering no man knows what agony, I met Jim Wilson and paid him the two hundred and fifty dollars on account; and to think that here you are, now, and I haven't got a cent! But as sure as I am standing here on this ground on this particular brick,—there, I've scratched a mark on the brick to remember it by,—I'll borrow that money and pay it over to you at twelve o'clock sharp, tomorrow! Now, stand so; let me look at you just once more.'

And so on. Yates's life became a burden to him. He could not escape his debtor and his debtor's awful sufferings on account of not being able to pay. He dreaded to show himself in the street, lest he should find Stephen lying in wait for him at the corner.



Bogart's billiard saloon was a great resort for pilots in those days. They met there about as much to exchange river news as to play. One morning Yates was there; Stephen was there, too, but kept out of sight. But by and by, when about all the pilots had arrived who were in town, Stephen suddenly appeared in the midst, and rushed for Yates as for a long-lost brother.

'OH, I am so glad to see you! Oh my soul, the sight of you is such a comfort to my eyes! Gentlemen, I owe all of you money; among you I owe probably forty thousand dollars. I want to pay it; I intend to pay it every last cent of it. You all know, without my telling you, what sorrow it has cost me to remain so long under such deep obligations to such patient and generous friends; but the sharpest pang I suffer—by far the sharpest—is from the debt I owe to this noble young man here; and I have come to this place this morning especially to make the announcement that I have at last found a method whereby I can pay off all my debts! And most especially I wanted HIM to be here when I announced it. Yes, my faithful friend,—my benefactor, I've found the method! I've found the method to pay off all my debts, and you'll get your money!' Hope dawned in Yates's eye; then Stephen, beaming benignantly, and placing his hand upon Yates's head, added, 'I am going to pay them off in alphabetical order!'



Then he turned and disappeared. The full significance of Stephen's 'method' did not dawn upon the perplexed and musing crowd for some two minutes; and then Yates murmured with a sigh—

'Well, the Y's stand a gaudy chance. He won't get any further than the C's in THIS world, and I reckon that after a good deal of eternity has wasted away in the next one, I'll still be referred to up there as "that poor, ragged pilot that came here from St. Louis in the early days!"'



## Chapter 18

### I Take a Few Extra Lessons

DURING the two or two and a half years of my apprenticeship, I served under many pilots, and had experience of many kinds of steamboatmen and many varieties of steamboats; for it was not always convenient for Mr. Bixby to have me with him, and in such cases he sent me with somebody else. I am to this day profiting somewhat by that experience; for in that brief, sharp schooling, I got personally and familiarly acquainted with about all the different types of human nature that are to be found in fiction, biography, or history. The fact is daily borne in upon me, that the average shore-employment requires as much as forty years to equip a man with this sort of an education. When I say I am still profiting by this thing, I do not mean that it has constituted me a judge of men—no, it has not done that; for judges of men are born, not made. My profit is various in kind and degree; but the feature of it which I value most is the zest which that early experience has given to my later reading. When I find a well-drawn character in fiction or biography, I generally take a warm personal interest in him, for the reason that I have known him before—met him on the river.

The figure that comes before me oftenest, out of the shadows of that vanished time, is that of Brown, of the steamer 'Pennsylvania'—the man referred to in a former chapter, whose memory was so good and tiresome. He was a middle-aged, long, slim, bony, smooth-shaven, horse-faced, ignorant, stingy, malicious, snarling, fault hunting, mote-magnifying tyrant. I early got the habit of coming on watch with dread at my heart. No matter how good a time I might have been having with the off-watch below, and no matter how high my spirits might be when I started aloft, my soul became lead in my body the moment I approached the pilot-house.



I still remember the first time I ever entered the presence of that man. The boat had backed out from St. Louis and was 'straightening down;' I ascended to the pilot-house in high feather, and very proud to be semi-officially a member of the executive family of so fast and famous a boat. Brown was at the wheel. I paused in the middle of the room, all fixed to make my bow, but Brown did not look around. I thought he took a furtive glance at me out of the corner of his eye, but as not even this notice was repeated, I judged I had been mistaken. By this time he was picking his way among some dangerous 'breaks' abreast the woodyards; therefore it would not be proper to interrupt him; so I stepped softly to the high bench and took a seat.

There was silence for ten minutes; then my new boss turned and inspected me deliberately and painstakingly from head to heel—as it seemed to me—a quarter of an hour. After which he removed his countenance and I saw it no more for some seconds; then it came around once more, and this question greeted me—

'Are you Horace Bigsby's cub?'

'Yes, sir.'

After this there was a pause and another inspection. Then—



Then :

“What’s your name?”

I told him. He repeated it after me. It was probably the only thing he ever forgot; for although I was with him many months he never addressed himself to me in any other way than “Here!” and then his command followed.

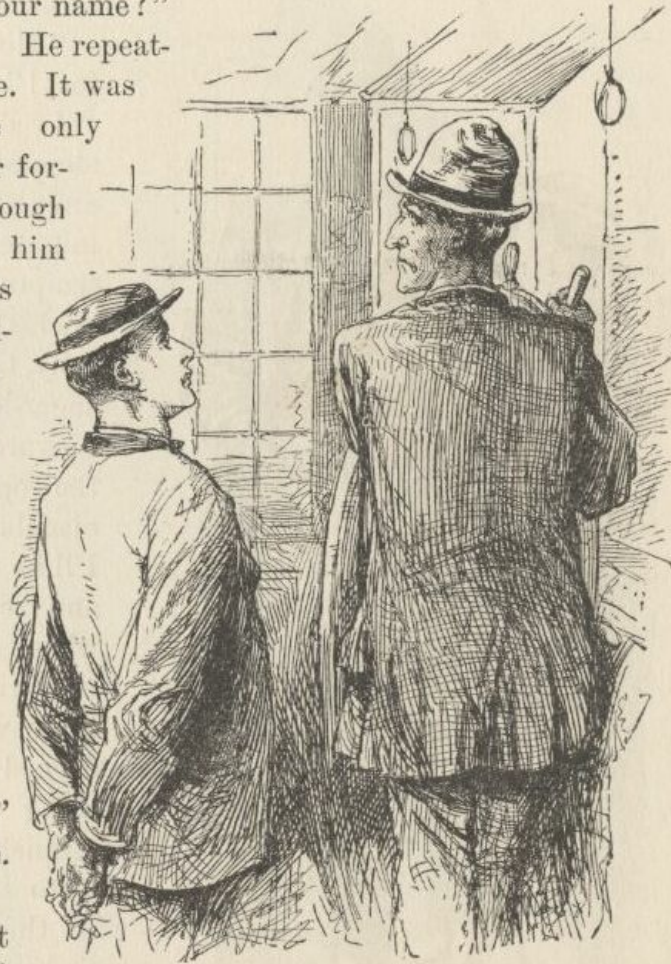
“Where was you born?”

“In Florida, Missouri.”

A pause.

Then : —

“Dern sight better staid there!”



“ARE YOU HORACE BIGSBY’S CUB?”

'What's your name?'

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'Where was you born?'

'In Florida, Missouri.'

A pause. Then—

'Dern sight better staid there!'

By means of a dozen or so of pretty direct questions, he pumped my family history out of me.

The leads were going now, in the first crossing. This interrupted the inquest. When the leads had been laid in, he resumed—

'How long you been on the river?'

I told him. After a pause—

'Where'd you get them shoes?'

I gave him the information.

'Hold up your foot!'

I did so. He stepped back, examined the shoe minutely and contemptuously, scratching his head thoughtfully, tilting his high sugar-loaf hat well forward to facilitate the operation, then ejaculated, 'Well, I'll be dod derned!' and returned to his wheel.



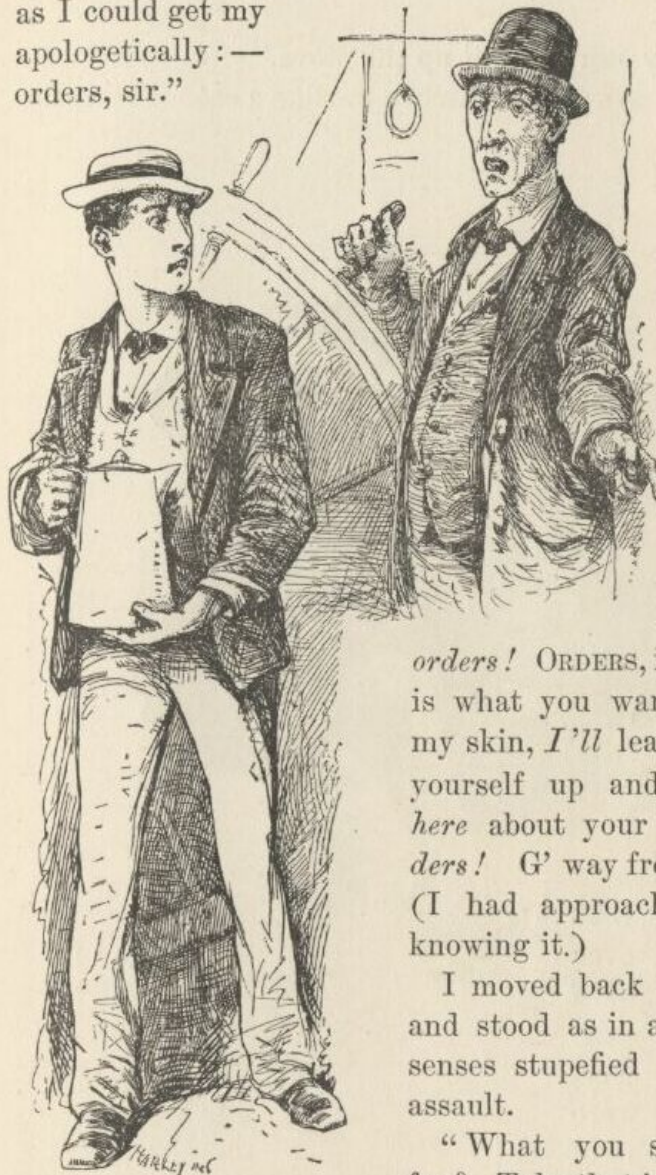
What occasion there was to be dod derved about it is a thing which is still as much of a mystery to me now as it was then. It must have been all of fifteen minutes—fifteen minutes of dull, homesick silence—before that long horse-face swung round upon me again—and then, what a change! It was as red as fire, and every muscle in it was working. Now came this shriek—



"Here!—You going to set there all day?"

I lit in the middle of the floor, shot there by the electric suddenness of the surprise. As soon as I could get my voice I said, apologetically:—

orders, sir."



"TAKE THAT ICE PITCHER."

all day about it!"

As soon as I said, "I have had no orders! My, what a fine bird we are! We must have orders! Our father was a gentleman—owned slaves—and we've been to school. Yes, we are a gentleman, too, and got to have

orders! ORDERS, is it? ORDERS is what you want! Dod dern my skin, I'll learn you to swell yourself up and blow around here about your dod-derned orders! G' way from the wheel!" (I had approached it without knowing it.)

I moved back a step or two, and stood as in a dream, all my senses stupefied by this frantic assault.

"What you standing there for? Take that ice-pitcher down to the texas-tender—come, move along, and don't you be

'Here!—You going to set there all day?'

I lit in the middle of the floor, shot there by the electric suddenness of the surprise. As soon as I could get my voice I said, apologetically:—"I have had no orders, sir.'

'You've had no ORDERS! My, what a fine bird we are! We must have ORDERS! Our father was a GENTLEMAN—owned slaves—and we've been to SCHOOL. Yes, WE are a gentleman, TOO, and got to have ORDERS! ORDERS, is it? ORDERS is what you want! Dod dern my skin, I'LL learn you to swell yourself up and blow around here about your dod-derned ORDERS! G'way from the wheel!' (I had approached it without knowing it.)

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'What you standing there for? Take that ice-pitcher down to the texas-tender—come, move along, and don't you be all day about it!'

The moment I got back to the pilot-house, Brown said—

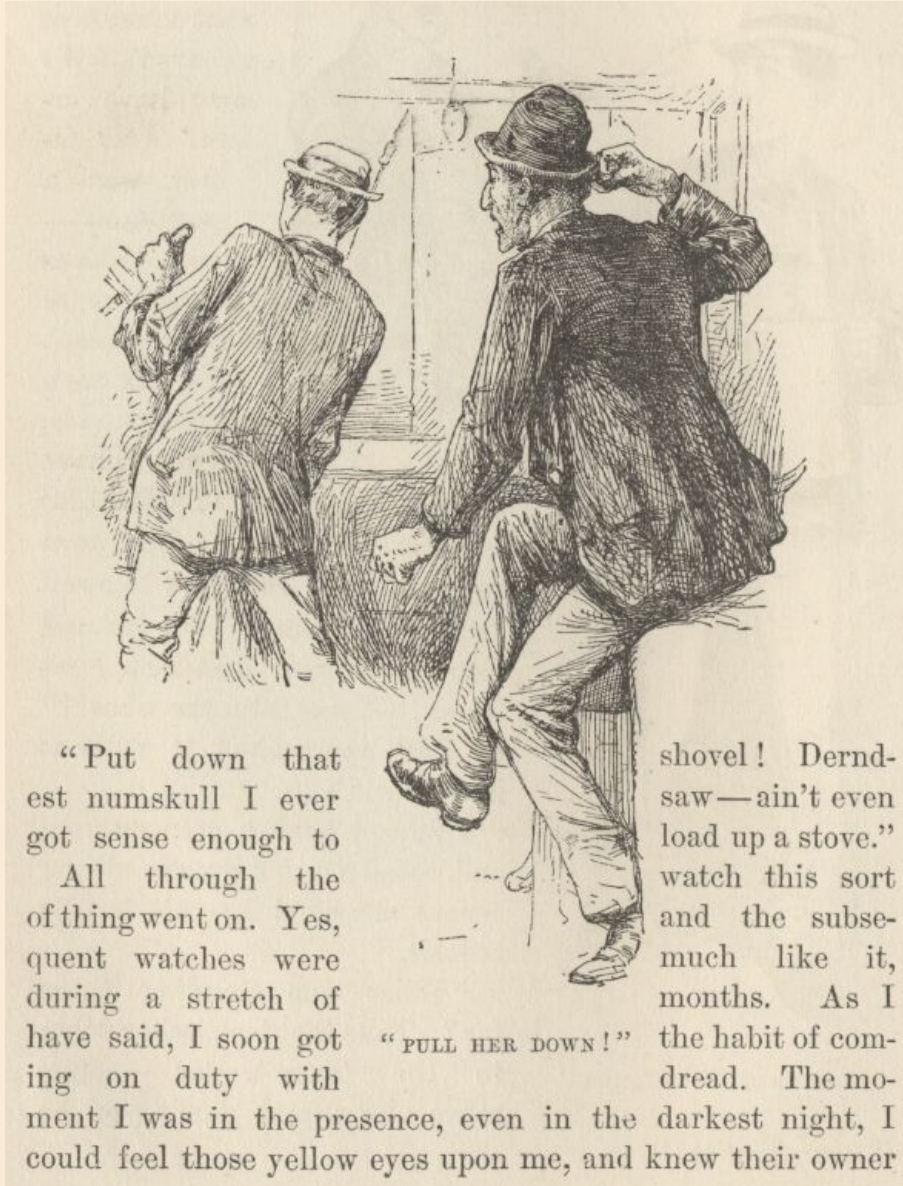
'Here! What was you doing down there all this time?'

'I couldn't find the texas-tender; I had to go all the way to the pantry.'



'Derned likely story! Fill up the stove.'

I proceeded to do so. He watched me like a cat. Presently he shouted—



'Put down that shovel! Deadeest numskull I ever saw—ain't even got sense enough to load up a stove.'

All through the watch this sort of thing went on. Yes, and the subsequent watches were much like it, during a stretch of months. As I have said, I soon got the habit of coming on duty with dread. The moment I was in the presence, even in the darkest night, I could feel those yellow eyes upon me, and knew their owner was watching for a pretext to spit out some venom on me. Preliminarily he would say—

'Here! Take the wheel.'

Two minutes later—

'WHERE in the nation you going to? Pull her down! pull her down!'

After another moment—

'Say! You going to hold her all day? Let her go—meet her! meet her!'

Then he would jump from the bench, snatch the wheel from me, and meet her himself, pouring out wrath upon me all the time.

George Ritchie was the other pilot's cub. He was having good times now; for his boss, George Ealer, was as kindhearted as Brown wasn't. Ritchie had steeled for Brown the season before; consequently he knew exactly how to entertain himself and plague me, all by the one operation. Whenever I took the wheel for a moment on Ealer's watch, Ritchie would sit back on the bench

and play Brown, with continual ejaculations of 'Snatch her! snatch her! Derndest mud-cat I ever saw!' 'Here! Where you going NOW? Going to run over that snag?' 'Pull her DOWN! Don't you hear me? Pull her DOWN!' 'There she goes! JUST as I expected! I TOLD you not to cramp that reef. G'way from the wheel!'

So I always had a rough time of it, no matter whose watch it was; and sometimes it seemed to me that Ritchie's good-natured badgering was pretty nearly as aggravating as Brown's dead-earnest nagging.

I often wanted to kill Brown, but this would not answer. A cub had to take everything his boss gave, in the way of vigorous comment and criticism; and we all believed that there was a United States law making it a penitentiary offense to strike or threaten a pilot who was on duty. However, I could IMAGINE myself killing Brown; there was no law against that; and that was the thing I used always to do the moment I was abed. Instead of going over my river in my mind as was my duty, I threw business aside for pleasure, and killed Brown. I killed Brown every night for months; not in old, stale, commonplace ways, but in new and picturesque ones;—ways that were sometimes surprising for freshness of design and ghastliness of situation and environment.

Brown was *always* watching for a pretext to find fault; and if he could find no plausible pretext, he would invent one. He would scold you for shaving a shore, and for not shaving it; for hugging a bar, and for not hugging it; for



"I KILLED BROWN EVERY NIGHT."

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One day we were approaching New Madrid, bound down and heavily laden. Brown was at one side of the wheel, steering; I was at the other, standing by to 'pull down' or 'shove up.' He cast a furtive glance at me every now and then. I had long ago learned what that meant; viz., he was trying to invent a trap for me. I wondered what shape it was going to take. By and by he stepped back from the wheel and said in his usual snarly way—

'Here!—See if you've got gumption enough to round her to.'

This was simply BOUND to be a success; nothing could prevent it; for he had never allowed me to round the boat to before; consequently, no matter how I might do the thing, he could find free fault with it. He stood back there with his greedy eye on me, and the result was what might have been foreseen: I lost my head in a quarter of a minute, and didn't know what I was about; I started too early to bring the boat around, but detected a green gleam of joy in Brown's eye, and corrected my mistake; I started around once more while too high up, but corrected myself again in time; I made other false moves, and still managed to save myself; but at last I grew so confused and anxious that I tumbled into the very worst blunder of all—I got too far down before beginning to fetch the boat around. Brown's chance was come.



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“HURLED ME ACROSS THE HOUSE.”

His face turned red with passion; he made one bound, hurled me across the house with a sweep of his arm, spun the wheel down, and began to pour out a stream of vituperation upon me which lasted till he was out of breath. In the course of this speech he called me all the different kinds of hard names he could think of, and once or twice I thought he was even going to swear—but he didn't this time. 'Dod dern' was the nearest he ventured to the luxury of swearing, for he had been brought up with a wholesome respect for future fire and brimstone.

That was an uncomfortable hour; for there was a big audience on the hurricane deck. When I went to bed that night, I killed Brown in seventeen different ways—all of them new.





## Chapter 19

### Brown and I Exchange Compliments

Two trips later, I got into serious trouble. Brown was steering; I was 'pulling down.' My younger brother appeared on the hurricane deck, and shouted to Brown to stop at some landing or other a mile or so below. Brown gave no intimation that he had heard anything. But that was his way: he never condescended to take notice of an under clerk. The wind was blowing; Brown was deaf (although he always pretended he wasn't), and I very much doubted if he had heard the order. If I had two heads, I would have spoken; but as I had only one, it seemed judicious to take care of it; so I kept still.

Presently, sure enough, we went sailing by that plantation. Captain Klinefelter appeared on the deck, and said—

'Let her come around, sir, let her come around. Didn't Henry tell you to land here?'

'NO, sir!'

'I sent him up to do, it.'

'He did come up; and that's all the good it done, the dod-derned fool. He never said anything.'

'Didn't YOU hear him?' asked the captain of me.

Of course I didn't want to be mixed up in this business, but there was no way to avoid it; so I said—

'Yes, sir.'

I knew what Brown's next remark would be, before he uttered it; it was—

'Shut your mouth! you never heard anything of the kind.'

I closed my mouth according to instructions. An hour later, Henry entered the pilot-house, unaware of what had been going on. He was a thoroughly inoffensive boy, and I was sorry to see him come, for I knew Brown would have no pity on him. Brown began, straightway—

'Here! why didn't you tell me we'd got to land at that plantation?'

'I did tell you, Mr. Brown.'

'It's a lie!'

I said—

'You lie, yourself. He did tell you.'

Brown glared at me in unaffected surprise; and for as much as a moment he was entirely speechless; then he shouted to me—

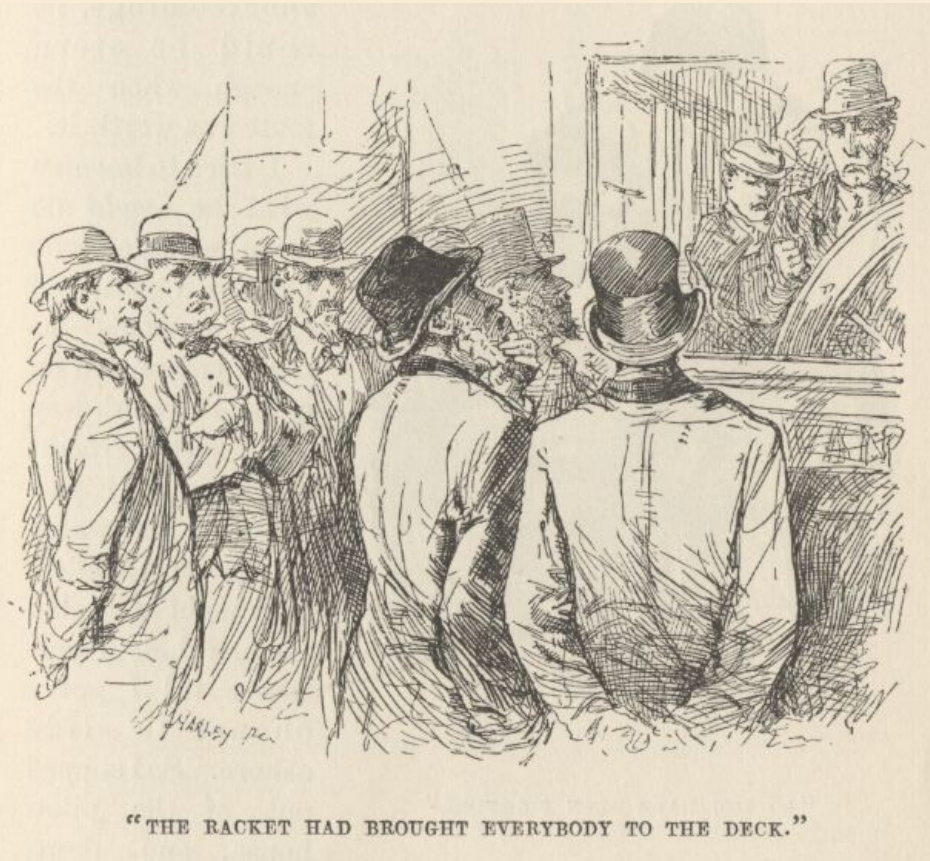
'I'll attend to your case in half a minute!' then to Henry, 'And you leave the pilot-house; out with you!'

It was pilot law, and must be obeyed. The boy started out, and even had his foot on the upper step outside the door, when Brown, with a sudden access of fury, picked up a ten-pound lump of coal and sprang after him; but I was between, with a heavy stool, and I hit Brown a good honest blow which stretched-him out.



I had committed the crime of crimes—I had lifted my hand against a pilot on duty! I supposed I was booked for the penitentiary sure, and couldn't be booked any surer if I went on and squared my long account with this person while I had the chance; consequently I stuck to him and pounded him with my fists a considerable time—I do not know how long, the pleasure of it probably made it seem longer than it really was;—but in the end he struggled free and jumped up and sprang to the wheel: a very natural solicitude, for, all this time, here was this steamboat tearing down the river at the rate of fifteen miles an hour and nobody at the helm! However, Eagle Bend was two miles wide at this bank-full stage, and correspondingly long and deep; and the boat was steering herself straight down the middle and taking no chances. Still, that was only

luck—a body MIGHT have found her charging into the woods.



Perceiving, at a glance, that the 'Pennsylvania' was in no danger, Brown gathered up the big spy-glass, war-club fashion, and ordered me out of the pilot-house with more than Comanche bluster. But I was not afraid of him now; so, instead of going, I tarried, and criticized his grammar; I reformed his ferocious speeches for him, and put them into good English, calling his attention to the advantage of pure English over the bastard dialect of the Pennsylvanian collieries whence he was extracted. He could have done his part to admiration in a cross-fire of mere vituperation, of course; but he was not equipped for this species of controversy; so he presently laid aside his glass and took the wheel, muttering and shaking his head; and I retired to the bench. The racket had brought everybody to the hurricane deck, and I trembled when I saw the old captain looking up from the midst of the crowd. I said to myself, 'Now I AM done for!'—For although, as a rule, he was so fatherly and indulgent toward the boat's family, and so patient of minor shortcomings, he could be stern enough when the fault was worth it.

I tried to imagine what he WOULD do to a cub pilot who had been guilty of such a crime as mine, committed on a boat guard-deep with costly freight and alive with passengers. Our watch was nearly ended. I thought I would go and hide somewhere till I got a chance to slide ashore. So I slipped out of the pilot-house, and down the steps, and around to the texas door—and was in the act of gliding within, when the captain confronted me! I dropped my head, and he stood over me in silence a moment or two, then said impressively—

'Follow me.'





I dropped into his wake; he led the way to his parlor in the forward end of the texas. We were alone, now. He closed the after door; then moved slowly to the forward one and closed that. He sat down; I stood before him. He looked at me some little time, then said—

'So you have been fighting Mr. Brown?'

I answered meekly—

'Yes, sir.'

'Do you know that that is a very serious matter?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Are you aware that this boat was plowing down the river fully five minutes with no one at the wheel?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Did you strike him first?'

'Yes, sir.'

'What with?'

'A stool, sir.'

'Hard?'

'Middling, sir.'

'Did it knock him down?'

'He—he fell, sir.'

'Did you follow it up? Did you do anything further?'

'Yes, sir.'

'What did you do?'

'Pounded him, sir.'

'Pounded him?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Did you pound him much?—that is, severely?'

'One might call it that, sir, maybe.'

'I'm deuced glad of it! Hark ye, never mention that I said that. You have been guilty of a great crime; and don't you ever be guilty of it again, on this boat. BUT—lay for him ashore! Give him a good sound thrashing, do you hear? I'll pay the expenses. Now go—and mind you, not a word of this to anybody. Clear out with you!—you've been guilty of a great crime, you whelp!'

I slid out, happy with the sense of a close shave and a mighty deliverance; and I heard him laughing to himself and slapping his fat thighs after I had closed his door.

When Brown came off watch he went straight to the captain, who was talking with some passengers on the boiler deck, and demanded that I be put ashore in New Orleans—and added—

'I'll never turn a wheel on this boat again while that cub stays.'

The captain said—

'But he needn't come round when you are on watch, Mr. Brown.

'I won't even stay on the same boat with him. One of us has got to go ashore.'

'Very well,' said the captain, 'let it be yourself;' and resumed his talk with the passengers.



During the brief remainder of the trip, I knew how an emancipated slave feels; for I was an emancipated slave myself. While we lay at landings, I listened to George Ealer's flute; or to his readings from his two bibles, that is to say, Goldsmith and Shakespeare; or I played chess with him—and would have beaten him sometimes, only he always took back his last move and ran the game out differently.



## Chapter 20

### A Catastrophe

WE lay three days in New Orleans, but the captain did not succeed in finding another pilot; so he proposed that I should stand a daylight watch, and leave the night watches to George Ealer. But I was afraid; I had never stood a watch of any sort by myself, and I believed I should be sure to get into trouble in the head of some chute, or ground the boat in a near cut through some bar or other. Brown remained in his place; but he would not travel with me. So the captain gave me an order on the captain of the 'A. T. Lacey,' for a passage to St. Louis, and said he would find a new pilot there and my steersman's berth could then be resumed. The 'Lacey' was to leave a couple of days after the 'Pennsylvania.'





“HENRY AND I SAT CHATTING.”

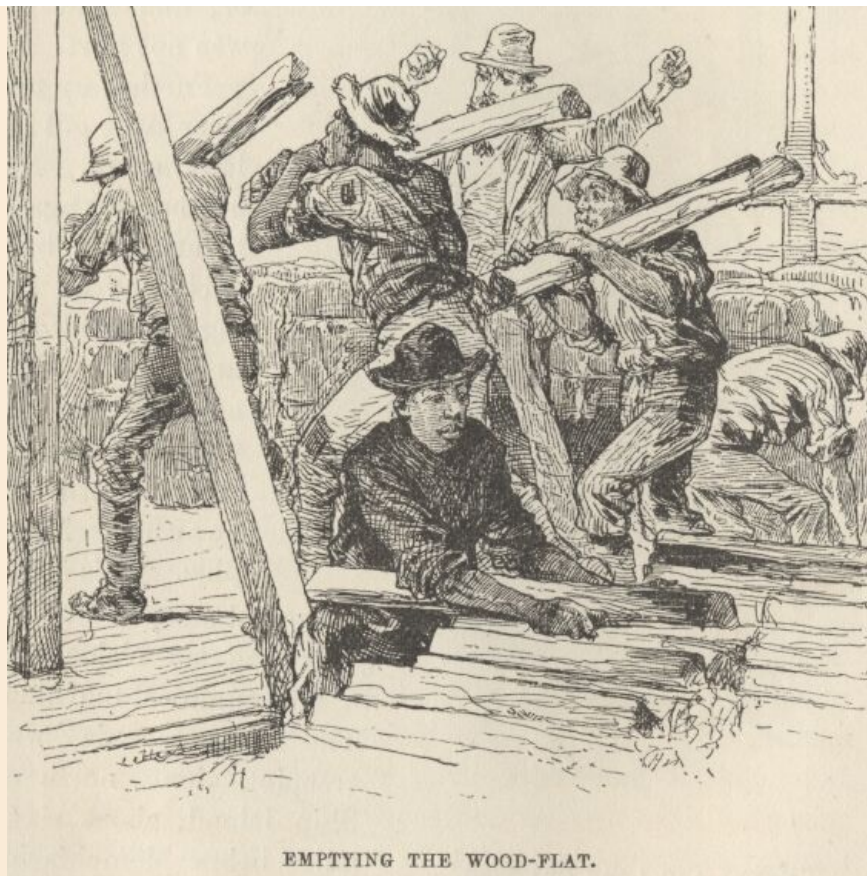
The night before the 'Pennsylvania' left, Henry and I sat chatting on a freight pile on the levee till midnight. The subject of the chat, mainly, was one which I think we had not exploited before—steamboat disasters. One was then on its way to us, little as we suspected it; the water which was to make the steam which should cause it, was washing past some point fifteen hundred miles up the river while we talked;—but it would arrive at the right time and the right place. We doubted if persons not clothed with authority were of much use in cases of disaster and attendant panic; still, they might be of SOME use; so we decided that if a disaster ever fell within our experience we would at least stick to the boat, and give such minor service as chance might throw in the way. Henry remembered this, afterward, when the disaster came, and acted accordingly.

The 'Lacey' started up the river two days behind the 'Pennsylvania.' We touched at Greenville, Mississippi, a couple of days out, and somebody shouted—

'The "Pennsylvania" is blown up at Ship Island, and a hundred and fifty lives lost!'

At Napoleon, Arkansas, the same evening, we got an extra, issued by a Memphis paper, which gave some particulars. It mentioned my brother, and said he was not hurt.

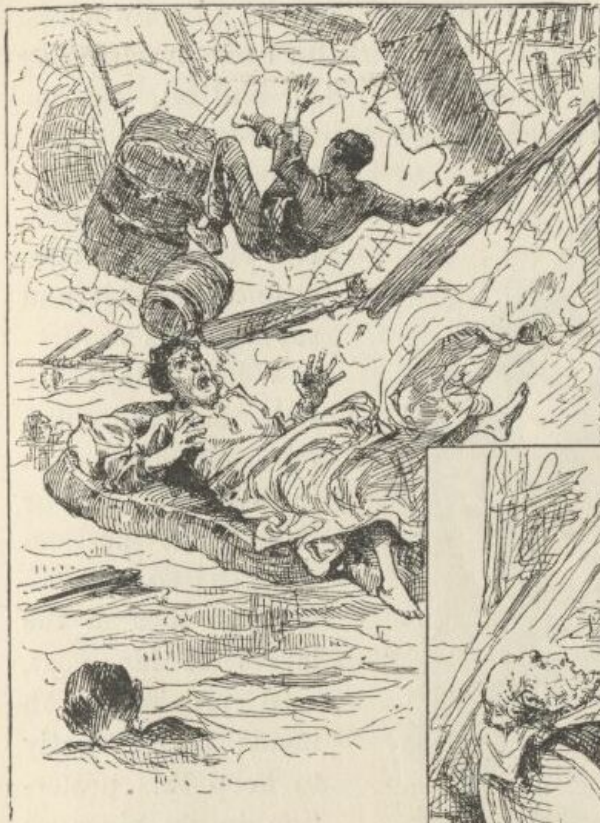
Further up the river we got a later extra. My brother was again mentioned; but this time as being hurt beyond help. We did not get full details of the catastrophe until we reached Memphis. This is the sorrowful story—



EMPTYING THE WOOD-FLAT.

It was six o'clock on a hot summer morning. The 'Pennsylvania' was creeping along, north of Ship Island, about sixty miles below Memphis on a half-head of steam, towing a wood-flat which was fast being emptied. George Ealer was in the pilot-house-alone, I think; the second engineer and a striker had the watch in the engine room; the second mate had the watch on deck; George Black, Mr. Wood, and my brother, clerks, were asleep, as were also Brown and the head engineer, the carpenter, the chief mate, and one striker; Captain Klinefelter was in the barber's chair, and the barber was preparing to shave him. There were a good many cabin passengers aboard, and three or four hundred deck passengers—so it was said at the time—and not very many of them were astir. The wood being nearly all out of the flat now, Ealer rang to 'come ahead' full steam, and the next moment four of the eight boilers exploded with a thunderous crash, and the whole forward third of the boat was hoisted toward the sky! The main part of the mass, with the chimneys, dropped upon the boat again, a mountain of riddled and chaotic rubbish—and then, after a little, fire broke out.





THE EXPLOSION.

Many people were flung to considerable distances, and fell in the river; among these were Mr. Wood and my brother, and the carpenter. The carpenter was still stretched upon his mattress when he struck the water seventy-five feet from the boat. Brown, the pilot, and George Black, chief clerk, were never seen or heard of



A STARTLED BARBER.

part of the mass, with the chimneys, dropped upon the boat again, a mountain of riddled and chaotic rubbish — and then, after a little, fire broke out.

Many people were flung to considerable distances, and fell in the river; among these were Mr. Wood and my brother, and the carpenter. The carpenter was still stretched upon his mattress when he struck the water seventy-five feet from the boat. Brown, the pilot, and George Black, chief clerk, were never seen or heard of after the explosion. The barber's chair, with Captain Klinefelter in it and unhurt, was left with its back overhanging vacancy—everything forward of it, floor and all, had disappeared; and the stupefied barber, who was also unhurt, stood with one toe projecting over space, still stirring his lather unconsciously, and saying, not a word.

When George Ealer saw the chimneys plunging aloft in front of him, he knew what the matter was; so he muffled his face in the lapels of his coat, and pressed both hands there tightly to keep this protection in its place so that no steam could get to his nose or mouth. He had ample time to attend to these details while he was going up and returning. He presently landed on top of the unexploded boilers, forty feet below the former pilot-house, accompanied by his wheel and a rain of other stuff, and enveloped in a cloud of scalding steam. All of the many who breathed that steam, died; none escaped. But Ealer breathed none of it. He made his way to the free air as quickly as he could; and when the steam cleared away he returned and climbed up on the boilers again, and patiently hunted out each and every one of his chessmen and the several joints of his flute.





By this time the fire was beginning to threaten. Shrieks and groans filled the air. A great many persons had been scalded, a great many crippled; the explosion had driven an iron crowbar through one man's body—I think they said he was a priest. He did not die at once, and his sufferings were very dreadful. A young French naval cadet, of fifteen, son of a French admiral, was fearfully scalded, but bore his tortures manfully. Both mates were badly scalded, but they stood to their posts, nevertheless. They drew the wood-boat aft, and they and the captain fought back the frantic herd of frightened immigrants till the wounded could be brought there and placed in safety first.

When Mr. Wood and Henry fell in the water, they struck out for shore, which was only a few hundred yards away; but Henry presently said he believed he was not hurt (what an unaccountable error!), and therefore would swim back to the boat and help save the wounded. So they parted, and Henry returned.

By this time the fire was making fierce headway, and several persons who were imprisoned under the ruins were begging piteously for help. All efforts to conquer the fire proved fruitless; so the buckets were presently thrown aside and the officers fell-to with axes and tried to cut the prisoners out. A striker was one of the captives; he said he was not injured, but could not free himself; and when he saw that the fire was likely to drive away the workers, he begged that some one would shoot him, and thus save him from the more dreadful death. The fire did drive the axmen away, and they had to listen, helpless, to this poor fellow's supplications till the flames ended his miseries.



The fire drove all into the wood-flat that could be accommodated there; it was cut adrift, then, and it and the burning steamer floated down the river toward Ship Island. They moored the flat at the head of the island, and there, unsheltered from the blazing sun, the half-naked occupants had to remain, without food or stimulants, or help for their hurts, during the rest of the day. A steamer came along, finally, and carried the unfortunates to Memphis, and there the most lavish assistance was at once forthcoming. By this time Henry was insensible. The physicians examined his injuries and saw that they were fatal, and naturally turned their main attention to patients who could be saved.

Forty of the wounded were placed upon pallets on the floor of a great public hall, and among these was Henry. There the ladies of Memphis came every day, with flowers, fruits, and dainties and delicacies of all kinds, and there they remained and nursed the wounded. All the physicians stood watches there, and all the medical students; and the rest of the town furnished money, or whatever else was wanted. And Memphis knew how to do all these things well; for many a disaster like the 'Pennsylvania's' had happened near her doors, and she was experienced, above all other cities on the river, in the gracious office of the Good Samaritan'

The sight I saw when I entered that large hall was new and strange to me. Two long rows of prostrate forms—more than forty, in all—and every face and head a shapeless wad of loose raw cotton. It was a gruesome spectacle. I watched there six days and nights, and a very melancholy experience it was. There was one daily incident which was peculiarly depressing: this was the removal of the doomed to a chamber apart. It was done in order that the MORALE of the other patients might not be injuriously affected by seeing one of their number in the death-agony. The fated one was always carried out with as little stir as possible, and the stretcher was always hidden from sight by a wall of assistants; but no matter: everybody knew what that cluster of bent forms, with its muffled step and its slow movement meant; and all eyes watched it wistfully, and a shudder went abreast of it like a wave.



THE HOSPITAL WARD.

I saw many poor fellows removed to the 'death-room,' and saw them no more afterward. But I saw our chief mate carried thither more than once. His hurts were frightful, especially his scalds. He was clothed in linseed oil and raw cotton to his waist, and resembled nothing human. He was often out of his mind; and then his pains would make him rave and shout and sometimes shriek. Then, after a period of dumb exhaustion, his disordered imagination would suddenly transform the great apartment into a fore-castle, and the hurrying throng of nurses into the crew; and he would come to a sitting posture and shout, 'Hump yourselves, HUMP yourselves, you petrifications, snail-bellies, pall-bearers! going to be all DAY getting that hatful of freight out?' and supplement this explosion with a firmament-obliterating irruption or profanity which nothing could stay or stop till his crater was empty. And now and then while these frenzies possessed him, he would tear off handfuls of the cotton and expose his cooked flesh to view. It was horrible. It was bad for the others, of course—this noise and these exhibitions; so the doctors tried to give him morphine to quiet him. But, in his mind or out of it, he would not take it. He said his wife had been killed by that treacherous drug, and he would die before he would take it. He suspected that the doctors were concealing it in his ordinary medicines and in his water—so he ceased from putting either to his lips. Once, when he had been without water during two sweltering days, he took the dipper in his hand, and the sight of the limpid fluid, and the misery of his thirst, tempted him almost beyond his strength; but he mastered himself and threw it away, and after that he allowed no more to be brought near him. Three times I saw him carried to the death-room, insensible and supposed to be dying; but each time he revived, cursed his attendants, and demanded to be taken back. He lived to be mate of a steamboat again.

But he was the only one who went to the death-room and returned alive. Dr. Peyton, a principal physician, and rich in all the attributes that go to constitute high and flawless character, did all that educated judgment and trained skill could do for Henry; but, as the newspapers had said in the beginning, his hurts were past help. On the evening of the sixth day his wandering mind busied itself with matters far away, and his nerveless fingers 'picked at his coverlet.' His hour had struck; we bore him to the death-room, poor boy.

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